

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY



SCRUTINY PANEL 3 – HOMELESSNESS

(PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY)

CORE QUESTIONS – EXPERT ADVISORS

The Scrutiny Panel is currently undertaking a review: Pre-Decision Scrutiny: To review how the Borough Council and its partners prevent homelessness and respond to those without homes in the borough

Key Lines of Enquiry

- To gain an understanding of the work currently being undertaken by Northampton Borough Council (NBC), partnerships, statutory and voluntary organisations to address homelessness
- To assess the extent of homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough assess the initiatives currently in place to tackle homelessness
- To examine the Council's Severe Weather Provision
- To gain an understanding of the effect on the health, wellbeing and the safety of homelessness people, including rough sleepers
- To gain an understanding of the causes and barriers to support homelessness
- Identify any specific groups that are not accessing services

The expected outcomes of this Scrutiny Review are:

- To reduce homelessness in the borough of Northampton
- An understanding of the local authority homelessness role and the services provided in Northampton
- A review of existing homelessness services in Northampton, in order to assess their quality and effectiveness and identify any significant gaps in service

CORE QUESTIONS:

A series of key questions have been put together to inform the evidence base of the Scrutiny Panel:

1. Please describe your understanding of the nature, causes and extent of homelessness and rough sleeping, and the impact that homelessness has on the health, wellbeing and safety of homeless people.

Rough sleepers are generally highly vulnerable individuals with very complex needs, more often than not also involved in street drinking and begging. Some rough sleepers do have, or have at some point, also had substance misuse problems, mental health problems, and may have suffered a traumatic childhood. It is also often found that there is a history of homelessness. Therefore, when dealing with this group it is important to recognise that enforcement on its own is not the answer, and their wider health issues need to be taken into consideration. Due to their complex needs, and the chaotic lifestyle of most rough sleepers, a multi-agency case management approach is adopted in addressing individuals.

2. Please describe the services, assistance and support that are available to people who are homeless, including rough sleepers.

- **NBC Homelessness Team (outreach, support and housing)**
- **Street Community Multi-agency Group (holistic case management approach)**
- **Oasis House (NAASH and Hope Centre, initial support re addiction and housing)**
- **No Second Night Out project (NAASH, initial support re housing)**
- **Maple Access Medical Centre (health support)**
- **Bridge Project (intervention and support)**
- **C2C Social Action (intervention, support & housing)**
- **S2S (substance misuse agency - treatment) -**
- **Can (substance misuse agency – treatment & housing)**
- **Women’s Aid (support and intervention)**

3. Please provide details of the contribution that your organisation is making (through its work and the initiatives in which it is involved) to tackle, prevent and reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough.

Community Safety, NBC lead on the Street Community Multi-Agency meetings. Due to the complex needs, and chaotic lifestyle of most rough sleepers, a multi-agency case management approach is adopted in addressing individuals. Cases can be referred by any of the agencies involved. At the meeting cases are discussed with relevant officers, issues identified and a support plan developed which ranges from intervention through to enforcement, if required. It is important to note that agencies, in the first instance, will always try to

engage and provide support to the individual. All case management is run through the ECIN's case management system.

Community Safety also takes the lead on the Killing with Kindness campaign that is run 2 -3 times a year. This sees a multi-agency publicity campaign to raise awareness on begging and rough sleeping to discourage the public from giving directly to those begging, together with the provision of donation boxes at awareness raising events - proceeds are passed to local homelessness charities. The campaign also raises awareness around the complex needs of rough sleepers, beggars and street drinkers.

4. Please provide details of the action that your organisation is taking to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of homeless people.

Due to the complex needs, and chaotic lifestyle of most rough sleepers, a multi-agency case management approach is adopted in addressing individuals. Due to increasing concerns about health, welfare and anti-social behaviour, a Rough Sleepers, Street Drinkers & Beggars working group was established in 2011. Recently this meeting has been reviewed and retitled Street Community Working Group. The main aim is to address health, welfare and dependency issues and provide support to enable rough sleepers to leave the streets, finding suitable accommodation

Cases can be referred by any of the agencies involved. At the meetings cases are discussed with relevant officers, issues identified and a support plan developed which ranges from intervention through to enforcement, if required. It is important to note that agencies, in the first instance, will always try to engage and provide support to the individual to address their health issues, drug & alcohol dependency problems and housing needs. However, if it is abundantly clear that they will not engage, and they are causing issues on the streets, the enforcement process will be followed.

5. Please provide details of the local Homelessness Strategy and Rough Sleepers Strategy and how their implementation is being monitored and assessed.

This will be provided by Head of Housing & Wellbeing

6. Please provide details of the arrangements that have been put in place to provide rough sleepers with emergency shelter during severe weather.

This will be provided by Head of Housing & Wellbeing

7. Please provide us with any statistics and data you hold in relation to the number of people / households that are homeless, and details of the methodology you have used to count the number of people sleeping rough.

This will be provided by Head of Housing & Wellbeing

8. Are you aware of any specific groups that are not accessing local services and, if you are, please can you provide details and describe the reasons why some homeless people are difficult to engage and support?

Rough sleepers are generally highly vulnerable individuals with very complex needs, and this in itself can make it hard to engage with them. Some rough sleepers do have, or have at some point, also had substance misuse problems, mental health problems, and may have suffered a traumatic childhood.

Over the past 10 years we have seen a change in the demographic of rough sleepers, with an increase in people from Europe. The main difficulties experienced are that the majority are rough sleeping by choice and do not want to be housed. However, a number of them also have drug and alcohol issues. In some cases they do not have any re-course to public funds, and may also not be exercising their Treaty Rights.

There are also some entrenched rough sleepers who do not want to, or find it very difficult to engage due to their long term drug/alcohol dependency issues and anti-social behaviour.

9. Are there any significant gaps in service and do the services link together well enough?

Over the years there have been varying levels in engagement from agencies. However, the Street Community Working Group has seen a great improvement in joined up working between agencies, both statutory and voluntary over recent months. The introduction of the Outreach workers has also seen an increase in the engagement of rough sleepers with support agencies.

There is however, always room for improvement in the approaches taken by agencies, and in providing a more co-ordinated approach

10. How can we increase awareness of the services, assistance and support available to people who are homeless, including rough sleepers?

- **Place more general information on NBC webpages. i.e. what rough sleeping is; how it can be reported; support services available etc.**
- **Consider creating a reporting hotline or joining a national hotline such as 'Street Link' - this has been done in other areas, and enables members of the public to report rough sleeper's locations and concerns.**
- **Continue to lead on the Killing with Kindness campaign to raise general awareness on rough sleeping, associated issues and support agencies.**

11. What action is being taken to ensure that all agencies and members of the public know what to do if they know that someone is homeless or sleeping rough?

- **Implementations of Rough Sleepers Strategy**
- **Multi-Agency seminars held**
- **Outreach Workers have been promoted with frontline services**
- **Multi-agency reviewed and refreshed**

12. Do you have any other information you are able to provide in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping?

13. What is the Council doing to bring empty homes back into use in Northampton?
(question for internal witnesses).